

(Washington, DC)- U.S. Representative Chet Edwards announced that the House passed vital funding for troops veterans, and their families under the final 2010 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill included in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2010. The final 2010 bill, which passed 221 to 202, builds on historic increases for veterans passed into law by Congress since January 2007.

**Edwards, Chairman of the House Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee said,** *"This bill sends a clear message to America's servicemen and women, their families, and our veterans that we deeply respect their service and sacrifice. With passage of this bill, Congress has provided a 60 percent increase in funding for veterans health care and benefits since January 2007. This is an unprecedented increase in Congress' commitment to veterans, and in my book, our veterans have earned every dime of this funding."*

In a major victory for veterans, the bill provides for the first time in history \$48.2 billion in advance appropriations for fiscal year 2011 for three medical accounts: medical services, medical support and compliance, and medical facilities to ensure timely and predictable funding for the veterans health care system.

*"For the first time ever, Congress has passed and the president will sign into law legislation that provides an advance appropriation for VA Medical Care," said Edwards. "This was a top priority of America's veterans' service organizations because it will allow the VA to invest taxpayers'*

*dollars more effectively and efficiently while improving health care benefits for veterans."*

**Raymond E. Dempsey, National Commander of Disabled American Veterans said, "Advanced Appropriations for VA health care has been the highest legislative priority for DAV and many other veterans service organizations in recent years."**

The bill is strongly supported by all major veterans service organizations including the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, AMVETS, and many others.

Overall, the 2010 bill totals \$134.6 billion, \$109.6 billion for the Department of Veterans Affairs, and \$24.7 billion for Military Construction. The bill provides a total of \$78.0 billion in discretionary spending, \$53 billion for the Department of Veterans Affairs, \$24.7 billion for Military Construction, Family Housing and BRAC, and \$280.7 million for related agencies.

## HISTORIC NEW POLICY

- **Advance VA Healthcare Appropriations:** For the first time in history, the bill provides \$48.2 billion in advance appropriations for fiscal year 2011 for three medical accounts: medical services, medical support and compliance, and medical facilities to ensure timely and predictable funding for the veterans health care system.

## HISTORIC INCREASES FOR VETERANS & MILITARY FAMILIES

- With passage of this bill, Congress has provided a 60 percent increase in funding for veterans health care and benefits since January 2007. This funding has resulted in a total increase of 8,300 claims processors, 145 community-based outpatient clinics, 70 Vet Centers, and more than 47,000 additional Veterans Health Administration employees. These additional resources will provide our veterans with their benefits more quickly and improve access to health care and other services.
- Congress has also funded several initiatives to improve the quality of life for our military and their families to include: \$3.2 billion for new military hospitals, \$1 billion for new child care centers to serve 20,000 military children, and \$920 million in additional funding for barracks.

**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS:** \$109.6 billion total, \$15.3 billion above 2009 and \$747 million above the President's request. The funding includes \$56.6 billion for mandatory veterans benefit programs and \$53 billion for discretionary veterans benefit programs. Total discretionary funding is \$5.4 billion above 2009.

## KEY INVESTMENTS

- **The 2010 VA budget exceeds the Independent Budget** recommended by major veterans service organizations. The VA discretionary total in the final bill is \$53.03 billion. The Independent Budget recommendation was \$52.08 billion.
- **Veterans Health Administration (VHA):** \$45.07 billion, an increase of \$4.1 billion, or 10% above 2009. The Veterans Health Administration estimates they will treat more than 6.1 million patients in 2010 including more than 419,000 veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan (56,000 more than 2010).
  - **Medical Services:** \$34.7 billion, a 12% increase above the 2009 level
  - **Rural Health:** \$250 million as requested to continue the Rural Health Initiative and an additional \$30 million to increase the number of Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) in rural areas for veterans who do not have ready access to VA hospitals. More than 3.2 million (41%) of enrolled veterans live in rural or highly rural areas.
  - **Mental Health:** \$4.6 billion, matching the request and \$300 million above 2009, for mental

health care to treat the psychological wounds of returning combat veterans, including post-traumatic stress disorder.

- **Assistance for Homeless Vets:** \$3.2 billion, matching the request and \$421 million above 2009, for healthcare and support services for homeless veterans.

- **VA Benefits Claims Processors:** \$1.7 billion, \$223 million above 2009, to enable the Department to hire roughly 1,200 additional claims processors to continue to address the backlog of benefits claims and to reduce the time to process new claims.

**MILITARY CONSTRUCTION:** \$24.7 billion total for Military Construction, Family Housing and BRAC, \$227 million above the President's Request.

## CONGRESSIONAL INITIATIVES

- Trainee Troop Housing Initiative: \$350 million in additional funding to accelerate the Army's program to modernize troop housing facilities for trainees. The Army has a need for \$2.2 billion to bring all 115,413 trainee barracks spaces up to standard and the program currently is not scheduled to finish until 2017.

- Guard and Reserve Initiative: \$200 million in additional funding is provided for Army National Guard, Air National Guard, Army Reserve, Navy and Marine Corps Reserve, and Air Force Reserve construction to address critical unfunded requirements, in recognition of the tremendous contributions made by Guard and Reserve personnel to emergency assistance, homeland security, and national defense.

- Energy Conservation Investment Program (ECIP): \$174 million, including \$10.5 million for planning and design, Funding will be used for energy conservation, green building initiatives, energy security, and investment in renewable energy resources.

- Homeowners Assistance Program: \$323 million or \$300 million above the President's budget request to provide mortgage relief to eligible personnel who sustain losses on the sale of their home due to relocation requirements during the current mortgage crisis, as well as wounded warriors and the spouses of fallen warriors.

